



Tom Noblitt, an EGRESS technician with DynCorp, inspects an ejection seat.



Carlos Sierra, an aircraft painter with DynCorp, applies a bonding epoxy to the pneumatic portion of the F-4's landing gear.

20th FS: US-tested, GAF approved

by **Airman Stephen Collier**
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Military aircraft zooming through the New Mexico sky is nothing unusual near Holloman, but the cooperation between the two countries that make up the 20th Fighter Squadron is something an observer on the ground could never imagine.

The 20th Fighter Squadron, nicknamed “the Silver Lobos,” has been performing its current mission of fighter training to German air force aircrews in the F-4 Phantom II since June 1992.

“We have three basic courses,” said Lt. Col. Mark Buccigrossi, commander of the 20th Fighter Squadron. “The first takes

brand new pilots and weapon system officers and trains them to perform combat missions in the F-4 fighter. The second course teaches fighter weapons instruction to GAF personnel. Once completed, GAF members go onto the last course of training, the Fighter Weapons Instructor Course, or FWIC.”

The 20th’s heritage traces back to World War II, where they were first designated the 20th Pursuit Squadron. They were tasked with defending the Philippines before its capture in 1942, according to Holloman’s web site. Once the war ended the unit was disbanded, only to be resurrected in 1972 at George Air Force Base, Calif., to train German aircrews. The mis-

sion moved to Holloman in 1992.

To perform their mission, the 20th has 29 officers who instruct aircrews-in-training, nine civilians and five enlisted personnel for mission support. Buccigrossi said his people contribute to Holloman’s mission on a grander scale.

“Other than supporting German F-4 crews, Germany is a part of NATO,” Buccigrossi said. “During Operation Allied Force in 1999, German fighter aircrews played a major part in the operations over Yugoslavia. We train the Germans not only to make them proficient in the F-4, but it brings a better fight to NATO and the U.S. They understand how our tactics work with theirs in a combat environment.”

Together with training German aircrews, the Silver Lobos participate in exercises outside of Holloman to hone their skills.

“We compete in adversary air war games with other Air Force units as well as U.S. Naval and Marine Corps aircraft,” Buccigrossi said. “We also take our fighter weapons classes to Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., where we integrate with the Air Force fighter weapons classes to train them for deployment. This puts them in an environment with other fighter aircraft and bombers.”

F-4 Phantoms of the 20th utilize different weapons to complete their mission. Primarily used for air defense of Germany, the German F-4 is equipped with APG-65 Radar. This radar is an upgraded system used to track targets at greater distances from the aircraft. The enhanced radar makes the aircraft’s AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, or AMRAAM,

even more effective. This missile is capable of taking out targets farther away than most missiles are able. For shorter range combat, the F-4 incorporates the AIM-9 Sidewinder missile and a 20mm Gatling gun for what Buccigrossi calls, “phone booth fighting.”

With all of the missions conducted by the 20th, challenges still face the squadron.

“The biggest challenge we are facing is trying to keep a 1970s vintage airframe flying with parts from Germany,” said Buccigrossi. “Because of the age of the aircraft, they tend to be maintenance-intensive. The other challenge we face is our de-activation in late December 2004. Once the training requirements for the GAF are fulfilled in the F-4, the squadron will be disbanded.”

Buccigrossi said the 20th is like a family when it comes to keeping mission ready. “We work very closely with DynCorp on base because they are the sole provider of maintenance to our squadron. These folks are very good at what they do in keeping this older aircraft flying. Together with the senior management of DynCorp, we come up with a training program that ultimately satisfies our main customer, the



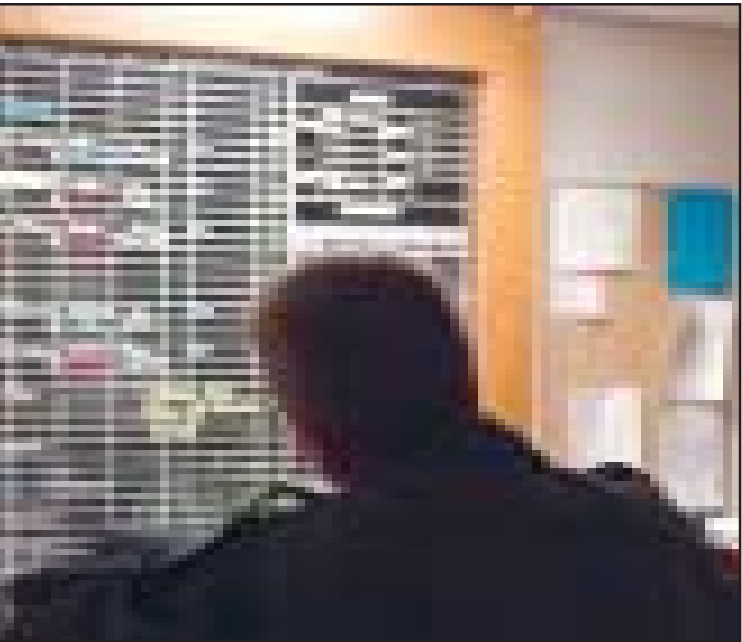
Candy Ten-Boom, a F-4 Phantom crew chief, wipes underneath the fuselage of one of the aircraft, cleaning off any foreign objects that can stick to the underbelly.

German Air Force. If there is ever a problem with one of the jets or a training mission is needed, the teamwork element comes into play to pull through for everyone.”

With a team of professionals dedicated to the mission, Buccigrossi said it is unfortunate that it will all come to an end.

“It’s just a fact of life that everything has an ending,” said Buccigrossi. “With the Ger-

mans obtaining the new Euro Fighter, their dependence on the F-4 Phantom is beginning to dwindle away, thus the training for the jet is slowly ending. It will be a sad day when we leave, but there had always been a 20th Fighter Squadron at Holloman. We’re going to go out in style, the same way we’ve always done business.”



GAF Maj. Guido Rixe examines the operations board to for the days scheduled flights.



Stephen Weight, an avionics technician with DynCorp, waves to 20th FS members as they return from a deployment to San Diego for training with Marine Corps aircraft.